

The Ballarat Naturalist

April 2017



FNCB 2016-2017 President's Report AGM 3rd March 2017

It is a pleasure to present the President's Report for the past year.

Attendance at meetings has been very good and exceeded 30 on occasions, averaging 27 including Stella Bedggood Lecture or 25 for the other 10 meetings. Excursions have been enjoyed by many members and visitors interested in observing plants and animals in their natural habitat. The average attendance on the 13 excursions was 16. Our financial membership hovers around 50 with at least 6 new members joining in the past year.

Our year began in April with Ian Bell explaining how meteorologists prepare weather forecasts and the sources of information available to the public. The excursion organised by Claire Dalman visited Serendip Sanctuary and Avalon Beach in the afternoon before a night walk at Mt Rothwell to see a variety of nocturnal animals.

In May, Graham Dent showed us the colourful birdlife of Papua New Guinea. Unfortunately John Petheram was unable to lead the La Gerche Trail excursion but John Gregurke filled in and we travelled through Creswick Forest on our return journey to Ballarat. On a mid-month excursion we were joined by the Berringa walking group as Emily Noble showed us many interesting plants in the Surface Hill Historic Area.

In June, John Gregurke spoke about the importance of hollows for a variety of animals. Les Hanrahan lead us on our annual fungi trip, this year to Mt Macedon, where we found many interesting fungi.

At the July meeting, seven members talked about and illustrated their favourite moments in the field. John Petheram lead us to many historical sites in the Creswick Forest dating from the time of John La Gerche.

Two members presented interesting talks at the August meeting. Val

Hocking talked of her trip to Africa and Emily Noble showed the diversity of orchids at Enfield. Emily led the excursion to three BEN reserves near Smythesdale. The extra excursion in the Sandy Patch at Enfield was finally held after being twice postponed due to poor weather conditions. This area was well known to FNCB members in the 1960's and was proclaimed the Berringa Flora and Fauna Reserve.

In September, Elspeth Swan spoke about 15 local remnant reserves. John Gregurke led an excursion to Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary, Devils Kitchen and Happy Valley, to which we had invited the Geelong Field Naturalists Club bird group.

While half the committee members were in WA for the ANN 2016 Get-together it was pleasing to see that the October activities continued as usual. Six club members spoke at the meeting on a variety of topics followed by visits to Elder's property at Scarsdale and Enfield Forest for the October excursion.

In November, our Stella Bedggood Memorial lecturer, John Morgan informed us of the history and management of grasslands. This topic was followed up when Emily Noble led an excursion to Victorian Volcanic Plains Grasslands at Mt Mercer, Rokewood and Illabarook.

In December, Steve Sorrell took us to the Gem and Mineral Show in Tucson, Arizona. Our Christmas break-up followed a visit to Canadian Regional Park monitoring sites led by John Petheram and John Gregurke and a walk around the Buninyong Botanic Gardens led by Lorraine Powell.

In February, Susan Krus outlined the history of the Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat from the first club formed in the 1890's. We wish Susan all the best as she continues her research studies for her Ph D. The February excursion visited the Scotsburn fire area, led by John Gregurke, to observe the recovery after a year.

The 2016-17 year draws to a close at tonight's meeting with members giving short presentations on the topic *Insect and Plant interactions*. On Sunday the excursion will be to Mullawallah Wetland and other local wetlands.

An interesting observation made when preparing this report was that four of the speakers were visitors to the Club while, at seven meetings, we heard from our own members. This showed the valuable knowledge and widespread interest in natural history held by our members. Some of these resulted from changes to the syllabus when

people were unable to be present due to other commitments. I thank the members for their contribution to the club program of speakers and excursions.

I wish to thank some people in particular. Emily Noble has continued to efficiently perform the task of secretary keeping us up to date with agendas, minutes and correspondence. Les Hanrahan has diligently handled the Club finances. Thanks to all the committee members who meet regularly to discuss the club program and doing many tasks to keep the club ticking along. Tammy Cornford edited several editions of the Ballarat Naturalist during Fran Hanrahan's absence. Thanks to Fran and Tammy for keeping us informed during the year.

Special mention must be made of Claire and Peter Dalman who are not re-nominating for the committee after serving for 30 and 13 years respectively. They have made excellent contributions to all aspects of the club. Both have been club president, Claire for 3 years and Peter for 10 years. They will still be members of the club and I am sure their active involvement will continue and I thank them for their many contributions in the past.

In conclusion thanks to all the members of the Club for be involved with FNCB during the last year. I look forward to continue working with you all and wish the Club another interesting and enjoyable year.

Yours naturally, John Gregurke

Presentations of Images of insect and plant interactions

Peter Noble

Peter introduced the theme of the evening by referring to his photo essay published in the Summer edition of the Ballarat Environment Network Newsletter. It was a mosaic of 56 smaller photos of invertebrates (and one tree frog) all scattered around a central photo of a eucalypt sapling. He noted that the breadth of the meaning of “*biodiversity*” is easily lost in the written and spoken word, and that as humans, we struggle to conceptualise what it really is. The photo essay was devised to exemplify the complexity of relationships between insects and plants.

Emily Noble

Emily used Peter’s photo essay as a springboard into some of the many different types of interactions between plants and insects. In

summary, insect interactions with plants include feeding (nectar, pollen, sap, leaves, leaf lamina, heartwood, seeds, fruits, other insects coming to the plant to feed, leaf litter), mating, home-making (using plant parts as building materials or simply foundations), egg-laying, “child” (instar) rearing and maturing into adulthood (metamorphosis). Some of the interactions seem devious, like sap-suckers injecting toxins into leaves to send a signal to the plant that the leaf is dying, prompting the plant to mobilise its key resources into its veins to “rescue” it before leaf drop. Meanwhile the sap-suckers line themselves up on the veins and drink their fill. Plants too have some remarkable ways to manipulate insect behaviour using scent, colour, rewards and form, to attract insects with the aim of achieving pollination or seed dispersal or a nutrient boost. Simply attracting wholesome insects to sticky, sophisticated-sucking traps can be dissolved by enzymes, i.e. sundews and bladderworts including Fairies Aprons.

Elizabeth Thurgood

Elizabeth showed a few snapshots of a variety of plants-animal interaction in and around some Australian deserts on her and Denis’s many trips back and forth, up and down, much of the continent of Australia.

Claire Dalman

Amegilla dawsoni - Dawson's burrowing bees.

We travelled to Kennedy Range National Park. in W.A. to see these bees. They occur in arid clay pans where they gather in large communities of perhaps 10,000 burrows but they only build solitary nests below ground. They are not honey producers. They line nest-capsules with wax then fill them with nectar and pollen. They only use four plant species and will fly beyond closer flowers to the preferred species. These are *cassia*, *eremo-*



Photo: *Amegilla dawsoni* - Dawson's burrowing bees

phila, solanum and trichodesma.

They are large bees - up to 23 millimetres long with a wingspan of 45 millimetres. They are covered in fur except for their faces and have long tongues to gather nectar.

Large males aggressively patrol emergence areas waiting to mate with virgin or recently mated females while smaller males - about 80% - wait on the fringe for a chance to find a female which escaped the emergence area unmated. Females only breed once a season. We enjoyed being very close to the bee activity and they apparently ignored us, evidently too busy with their activities.

Carol Hall

Carol showed a selection of images, of which several were taken in Victoria's high country such as the Spotted Alpine Zenicas mating on a Billy Button, and the Alpine Thermocolour Grasshopper which turns blue-green when the temperature is over 25°. Ants tending Eurymelid leaf-hoppers, and a dragonfly caught by sundews and a damselfly impaled on spikes of *Acaena* also featured.



Photo: Ant tending Eurymelid bugs.

The final shot of the Monarch butterfly photographed in upstate New York led to talk about the migration of these species between the highly localised small overwintering site in Mexico and the sites further north in the US where Common Milkweed - food for the caterpillars - allows 2-5 generations to develop before the latest of these generations returns to Mexico.

Andy Arnold

Andy's first photos were taken in English woodland in Shropshire. They included: dark Archer moth on birch demonstrating camouflage with wing patterns and the background bark, Birch leaves with numerous instars of the Birch shield bug *Elasmotethus interstinctus* feeding on the leaves, Birch leaves with numerous instars of the Birch shield bug *Elasmotethus interstinctus* feeding on the leaves

Then he showed photos, taken in Namid desert in Namibia, of

Welwitschia mirabilis hosting the pyrrhocorid bug *Odontopus sex-puntatis* which is unique to this endemic plant species. It is likely to assist plant in pollination.

Val Hocking

Val finished the rather late evening's viewing with photos of jewel beetles and butterflies, on alpine flowers and damp vegetation, and a blue damsel fly which was caught on a Bidgee Widgee *Acaena noivae-zelandiae*,. All these photos taken in the Falls Creek and Mt Hotham areas. Also included was a *past its best* photo of the *Aseroe rubra* fungus with blow flies.

Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat - Club Medal Award

Award of Merit citation for Leslie Hanrahan

The FNCB *Club Medal* has been awarded since 1993 to members who have given outstanding service to FNCB over a long period.

Les Hanrahan has been a member of the FNCB committee since 2001, having become a Club member a few years earlier. He has served as Treasurer for the past 12 years. During this time he has accurately recorded the financial transactions of the club and ensured that it has had excellent financial governance. He has undertaken significant extra work to manage the financial records for the two South East Australian Naturalists' Association camps hosted by FNB while he has been Treasurer.



He regularly contributes field reports, shows images and presents information at members nights and contributes information and photographs on the

Photo: President John Gregurke presenting Les Hanrahan with the Club medal

Erratum: In the March Newsletter, page 6, first line, Robert *White* should read Robert *Smith*.

Club website.

His area of expertise is fungi and he willingly shares his extensive knowledge. He has lead many special fungi excursions that are always well attended and which have become an annual feature for the Club, often attracting members from other clubs.

.John Gregurke, Club President

Excursion: Mullawallah and other local wetlands, 5 Mar

Leader John Gregurke

Fourteen club members gathered at Mullawallah wetlands, a Ballarat Environmental Network (BEN) reserve. BEN committee members, Emily and Peter Noble, were able to pass on to us interesting facts about the aboriginal heritage connected with the site. Emily related that, to the original inhabitants of the area, the wetlands were their equivalent to our present-day supermarket as it was an important source of various foods which they hunted and gathered in the wetlands. She also told us about projects to use funds allocated to BEN.

On the constructed walkway, which stretches out into the wetlands, quite a few birds were seen via various eyepieces including the telescope. (For the birds observed, a list prepared by John G. is given on P.9) Lignum bushes, which are not indigenous to local wetland, are prominent to the north of the walkway with their bushy structure giving great cover for birds. Plants growing near the edge included blue flowering Poison Lobelia *Lobelia pratioides*, yellow flowering River Buttercup *Ranunculus inundatus* and Water Plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* with their tall seed heads

John then led us along the surveyed road-reserve which runs from the carpark west to a location where we could again easily see the edge of the wetland. Nearby was a plant, Prickfoot *Eryngium vesiculosum*, similar to Blue Devil but Prickfoot spreads along the ground.

We left Mullawallah to head to Macarthur Park Wetlands, Miner's Rest. These wetlands, on the Burrumbeet Creek, were developed in 2004 when the housing estate Macarthur Park was constructed. The

wetlands are fed from the sewage farm. The water from the creek that is not flowing through the wetlands flows in a bypass drain to the east of the area. Along part of the western edge of the Park is a row of Spotted Gums *E maculata* which are frequently planted as street trees although not indigenous to Ballarat. Bordering the water was a great variety of shrubs and trees giving a picture of a great range of greens, blues and greys in the flora. Among the trees were also Swamp Gums *E ovata* with their wavy-edged leaves. Covering one region of the water was Duckweed which was thick enough to look like a neat lawn that you could walk across the area but no-one tried! Many birds were again spotted and are also listed on P. 9.

We had a cuppa at Miners Rest Community Park in Albert St. and then, to get to Black Swamp we continued along the street which became Pound Hill Rd, then Hendersons Rd, and we turned left on to Avenue Road from which we entered the Western Hwy. A short distance along this we turned left into Dobson Lane and continued along it until we just passed the Black Swamp on our right and parked in the hay yard of a private property. The water of the swamp had receded and so it was some distance from the edge but with the help of the telescope we were able to view closely the abundance of birds scattered across the water. There were Eucalypts planted along the edge but they were not indigenous to the area.

The next three stops on the edge of Lake Burrumbeet were: at Racecourse Point where we had lunch, Park Point from where, among other birds we viewed a flock of feeding Pelicans and Russell Reserve where we saw an aboriginal treasure - a scar tree- which had been chopped down but the thieves did not remove the wood, probably because of prompt publicity.

Near Lake Burrumbeet John named many of the trees for us using leaves and nuts to identify them.

But John had kept the best to last for which we continued on our way back to Ballarat via Carngham Road, Haddon Rd on to Racecourse Road where we stopped at another BEN reserve. Here, I think to John's relief, we had a good view through the telescope of two Broilgas. They have successfully hatched two chicks but these were not visible.

Then it was time for afternoon tea back in Haddon at the Lions Park, on the bank of the Woody Yaloak. There Andy A. thought he saw a rail disappear into the reeds. We then did a *water watch* and saw many creatures including many small and a couple of large fish, and insects, Carol later identified the Red and Blue Damselflies, *Xanthagrion erythroneurum*.

Even if we had not finished the day, viewing the Broilgas, the day would have been claimed to be interesting with John taking us to picturesque sites with plenty of flora and fauna to see.

Fran Hanrahan

John Gregurke’s list of birds seen on excursion.

Australasian Shoveler	Mulla				
Grey Teal		M Park	Black	B'beet	Haddon
Chestnut Teal	Mulla	M Park			
Pacific Black Duck	Mulla	M Park			
Little Pied Cormorant	Mulla	M Park		B'beet	
Australian Pelican				B'beet	
White-necked Heron	Mulla			B'beet	
White-faced Heron	Mulla			B'beet	
Australian White Ibis	Mulla			B'beet	Haddon
Straw-necked Ibis				B'beet	
Brolga					Haddon
Purple Swamphe	Mulla				
Black-tailed Native-hen	Mulla				
Dusky Moorhen	Mulla			B'beet	
Eurasian Coot	Mulla	M Park		B'beet	
Black-winged Stilt			Black		
Red-necked Avocet			Black		
Masked Lapwing	Mulla		Black	B'beet	
Silver Gull			Black	B'beet	
Long-billed Corella				B'beet	
Crimson Rosella	Mulla				
Superb Fairy-wren	Mulla	M Park		B'beet	
Brown Thornbill				B'beet	
White-plumed Honeyeater		M Park			
Red Wattlebird		M Park		B'beet	
New Holland Honeyeater		M Park			
Australian Magpie				B'beet	
Grey Fantail				B'beet	
Willie Wagtail	Mulla	M Park	Black		
Little Raven				B'beet	
Magpie-lark				B'beet	
Australian Reed-Warbler	Mulla	M Park			

FNCB Memberships To pay membership at a bank or on line, details are :
Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Inc., Bendigo Bank, **BSB 633 000** Account no.
1191 12290 ***Please remember to add your name***

<i>Ordinary member</i>	\$35
<i>Family</i>	\$55
<i>Distant member (postage included)</i>	\$20
<i>Student</i>	\$15
<i>Newsletter postage for ordinary member</i>	\$12



Excerpts from Meeting Minutes 3 March, 2017

Opening and Apologies Attendance: President welcomed 26 members and a visitor. Apol: Bill & Kathy Elder, Steve Sorrell, John Petheram, Ambika & Indra Bone, John Mildren, Ken Hammond.

Correspondence: IN:

From Bernard O'Callaghan, Brett Lane & Associates: letter asking if we are aware of any breeding or other records of broilgas held by the club or its members and not held by state databases. From John Petheram: copy of a letter found in the Melb Uni School of Forestry Creswick Campus library from Ferdinand von Mueller to Thomas Hart recommending starting up a field club. From Peter Rogers, SE-ANA: Feb. Agendas for AGM and General Meeting in Mar 2017.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

Peter Dalman moved that Denis be commissioned to continue representing FNCB on the SEANA Committee.

Reports: Treasurer's Report: Open bal: \$7,689.06; Inc: \$54.99; Exp: \$21.56; Clos bal: \$7,722.49

Friends of Canadian Corridor meeting: John G. reported that he and John Petheram briefly presented their flora monitoring activities/ results to FoCC. Alex Schipperen from Parks Vic gave the following update to FoCC: the proposed name for the Canadian Regional Park, "Woowookarung" (place of plenty) has been accepted and will soon be launched officially; track maintenance has been undertaken on key roads through the reserve, primarily for fire access; 150m³ of rubbish, including 170 tyres and 5 dumps of asbestos have been removed; Phytophthora hygiene stations to be installed at strategic locations for bikes and walkers; weed control has focused on Bluebell Creeper and Early Black Wattle. Bob Hartmann to follow up the idea of a corridor planting with the regional park planning committee. FNCB to lead a wildflower walk on Sunday October 15.

Banksia Information Session: Elspeth Swan reported interest in restoring Silver Banksias. Since first session, seeds have been collected and genetically tested for viability and genetic diversity. VicRoads has nominated several roadsides for establishment of seed orchards, mixing genetic pools with aim of maximising diversity and resilience.

General Business. BowerBird website: Emily had hoped to move a motion that a Club logon be set up for members to use, access and add records to site but has not yet had the chance to establish the re-

quirements and its implications. John Petheram has offered to help produce the Club newsletter. Susan Kruss has had some poor health news in the last week and Emily asked that members hold her in their thoughts over the next week as she heads to hospital for surgery, and then for the next few months as she recovers.

Show and Tell / Field Reports

John Gregurke reported that Curlew Sandpipers were one of the highlights of a trip to Western Treatment Plant. He also made the disconcerting report of dead Grey-headed Flying Foxes pinned to a farm fence between Winchelsea and Cressy. It wasn't known how they had died (road-kill or hunters?). What they were doing there so far from food sources and roost trees? Claire Dalman showed a copy of a letter from Jim Willis to Helen Burgess in 1988 with details of various plants at Mt Beckwith (Nananook) and an explanation of the reason behind his spelling of the reserve name (Major Mitchell named it after Col. Beckwith). She also handed around a Yam Daisy (Murnong *Microseris walteri*) uprooted from her garden to show the tubers. She had brought specimens of *Epacris longifolia*, *Pimelea nivea*, and a purple-flowering plant she hoped someone could identify. Also reported seeing her first water rats (Rakali) at Lake Wendouree's Durham Point on 2 consecutive nights. Carol Hall reported an Australian Hobby sitting on a gabled roof on Wendouree Parade. Elspeth Swan was sent a photo showing at least 70 brolga on Lake Muirhead. Andy Arnold reported a female Meadow Argus sitting on yellow mulch in his garden. He'd also heard a Reed Warbler in a clump of *Typha* in his local waterway. Paul Norquay saw 4 Wedge-tailed Eagles above stubble in a field next to Lake Burrumbeet, an echidna bathing in his bird baths at Mt Egerton and an adult copper-head snake on his driveway. Peter Dalman reported 4 magpies roosting each night in a self-seeded wattle he had just cut back to fence height in his backyard. Peter Noble described bird-life on the wetland at his property over the previous 2 months: Australasian Grebes had 5 chicks, one much younger than the others. The other four have fledged; 3 White-faced Herons and 2 Nankeen Night-herons foraging for 3 weeks; a pair of Sacred Kingfishers with a chick; very different mothering styles in two Pacific Black Duck families. Wayne McGuire took good photos of Brown Goshawk that landed in a tree near the Buninyong Fire Tower. Bryan Hanrahan asked for identification of a large moth (80-90mm wing-span), greyish with distinct white markings fluttering against his window at night.

CALENDAR 2017

April

Fri 7 *The Falkland Islands* - Robyn & Cynthia Watkins,
Bendigo FNC

Sun 9, 8.30am Exc: *Werribee Treatment Plant* - John Gregurke and
Peter Dalman, club members

Tues 25 No committee meeting to be held in April

May

Fri *Frogs Croaking* –Ray Draper, Ballarat Environmental
Network

Sun 5 *Lesser-known reserves*: Elspeth Swan, club member

Committee

President John Gregurke

Vice Pres Fran Hanrahan

Secretary Emily Noble Val Hocking

Treasurer Les Hanrahan John Mildren

Andy Arnold

Bill Elder

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 John Petheram

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Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr of Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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